

# “Smog Advisory Today”: Why should I care?

June 2005

Even healthy kids are vulnerable.

Smog is the direct result of human activity – air emissions from our homes, businesses and vehicles. Smog is a year-round issue that can affect everyone’s health, but children – even healthy children – are at high risk from smog. Kids may inhale more air pollutants since they tend to spend more time outdoors, are generally more active and have higher breathing rates than adults.

## What parents should know

Poor air quality can affect lung development of children. Since their lungs are not fully developed, early damage could increase the risk of respiratory disease in adult life.

Children exposed to high levels of smog may suffer from: reduced lung capacity, more pneumonia, bronchitis and other lung infections, more asthma attacks and worse symptoms.



## Warning Signs

Monitor your children closely to determine if and when they respond to smog. Warning signs that smog may be harming your kids include:

- Difficulty breathing
- Chest tightness and coughing
- Headache
- Eye, nose and throat irritation

- Aggravation of respiratory diseases (such as asthma)
- Low energy

For more information on the impacts of smog on your children’s health, visit:

[www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/pubhealth/smog.html](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/pub/pubhealth/smog.html)

In addition to children, other groups may experience adverse health effects at lower levels of air pollution:

- People with lung diseases and heart conditions
- People who play sports or exercise outdoors
- Pregnant women
- People with asthma
- Seniors
- Smokers



## How can I protect my kids?

Listen and watch for smog alerts on the radio or TV especially during traditional smog season (from May to September). You can also subscribe to Ontario’s *Smog Alert Network* at [www.airqualityontario.com](http://www.airqualityontario.com) and receive free smog notifications by e-mail.

To find the current air quality in your community go to [www.airqualityontario.com](http://www.airqualityontario.com) or call 1-800-387-7768 (English); 1-800-221-8852 (French).

*If a smog advisory is issued in your community:*

- While exercise is important for your kids, try to minimize their exertion and time spent outdoors when smog levels are high.
- Avoid or reduce exercising near areas of heavy traffic, because motor vehicles are a primary source of air pollution.
- If your child suffers from asthma or other respiratory or cardiac illness, it is essential that you speak with your physician about how to best manage their condition.
- Make sure your child's teachers, coaches and camp directors are aware of the health risks of air pollution, and have policies in place to protect the kids when air quality is unhealthy.
- If your child experiences any breathing difficulties or respiratory complications, contact your physician or go to the nearest hospital.

If your child has a heart or lung condition, talk to your health care professional about additional ways to protect your child's health when smog levels are high.



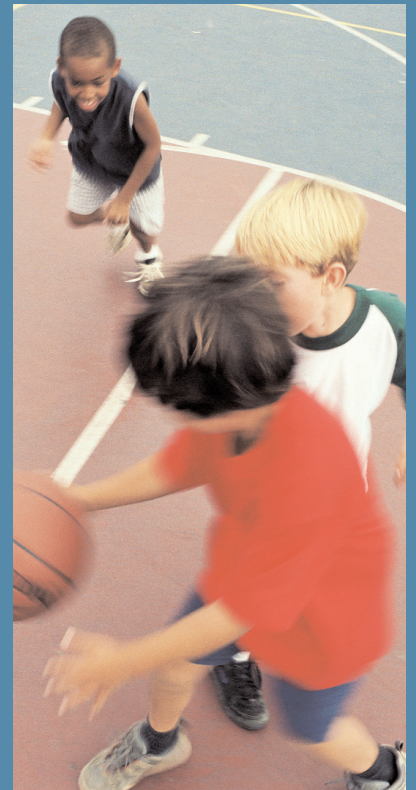
### **Reduce Smog, Reduce the Risk**

Whenever we burn fuel, we create the pollutants necessary to form smog. We burn oil and gas to power our cars and to heat and cool our homes. It is important to remember that much of Ontario's electricity is generated by burning fossil fuels, so reducing your energy consumption helps prevent smog.

*Here are some actions you can take to reduce smog:*

### **At home:**

- Conserve electricity by adjusting the heat or air conditioner and turning off lights you are not using.
- Limit the amount of wood you burn in your fireplace or wood stove. When burning wood, use only the dry, seasoned variety.
- Avoid letting your car, or any other engine, idle for long periods.
- Restrict your use of gasoline-powered equipment.
- Avoid mowing the lawn when air quality is poor.
- Don't use oil-based products such as paints, solvents or cleaners if you can avoid them. They contain volatile organic compounds (VOCs), which contribute to smog.
- Get engine tune-ups and car maintenance checks as advised by the car manufacturer's maintenance schedule.



### **At work:**

- If possible, take public transit or walk to work.
- If you use a car, don't travel alone; encourage and facilitate carpooling.
- Avoid traffic congestion.
- Consider teleconferencing, instead of travelling to meetings.

